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July 28, 1944

OFFICE OF INFORMATION MEMORANDUM NO. 71

Radio Program Participation

This memorandum revises the long established policy of the Department of Agriculture prohibiting participation in commercially sponsored radio programs. This policy was stated by the then Acting Director of Information, John R. Fleming, in a memorandum for Chiefs of Bureaus and Offices, dated September 7, 1937.

The Department still looks to stations and networks for sustaining time in which to present necessary public information; and the Department relies upon previous expressions of the radio industry that time always be available for public service use by Governmental and civic agencies.

Because the war greatly enlarged the Department's information responsibilities, it became advisable to avail ourselves of the opportunities offered by advertisers in carrying necessary messages to citizens whose understanding and cooperation are needed. Use of especially prepared Department statements and appearance of Department personnel in some commercial radio programs has been authorized in the past under special arrangements which make it clear to listeners that such participation does not constitute endorsement of concerns or products by the Department.

Continuation of this type of participation will be approved until further notice under the following stipulations:

1. Invitations to Department officials in Washington or in the field for participation in commercially sponsored programs over major networks shall be cleared through the Department's Office of Information before they are accepted. Acceptance of invitations for participation in commercially sponsored programs on local stations or local or regional networks received by field workers of the Department, or proposals made by these workers to stations or advertisers for such participation, shall be cleared in advance with the proper administrative officer of the agency involved. Once participation in a given commercially sponsored program has been approved, subsequent participation by Department field workers in that program or use of statements prepared for broadcast, are automatically authorized so long as conditions agreed upon in the original authorization are adhered to by the sponsor.

2. Participation will not be approved in any program that may lead the public to believe the sponsor is making time available to the Department or War Food Administration on the air as a means of obtaining special consideration not available to other concerns.
3. The Department cannot be put in the position of directly or indirectly endorsing a firm or its products. The program must therefore be handled in such a way as to clearly avoid endorsement. A disclaimer of endorsement may not be sufficient safeguard. A Department official shall neither participate in a commercial program nor supply statements for use in that program if what he says or prepares constitutes an endorsement of the sponsor's services or products.
4. The Department will retain full control of subject matter presented by its employees. Department officials must be free to present their information or recommendations without influence by the sponsor or his agents.
5. Department employees shall not participate in any program that would be embarrassing to the Department.

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